

To Whom It May Concern,

Thank you for your willingness and courage to examine the rehabilitation of sex offenders from a perspective that many find difficult to contemplate. To consider the issue from a rational, rather than an emotional, standpoint can require a great deal of effort to look beyond personal, sometimes even visceral reactions.

I am a convicted sex offender. I have caused irreparable damage in the lives of my victim, family and friends. I am guilty of a terrible offense, in my case to someone I cared for, but hurt anyway. I have accepted my 40 year sentence as a just consequence of my actions, and consider myself very fortunate to have had the bulk of my sentence suspended.

Without getting too involved in Psychoanalytic and Behavioral theory, I can say that after many years of treatment, and a lot of hard work, I now understand how and why I was able to groom myself to see my behavior as a viable course of action, even though I felt horrible about myself before, during and after my offending. As I began dealing with the reality of the harm I had caused, I felt guilt and remorse to the point of volunteering information that I knew would result in additional charges being brought against me. I did this because I realized it would help my victim, and myself, to get better. From day one, I have wanted to become a better person than who I had been, and to help, however I could, to heal the damage I had caused. I have since found that often the best and only thing I can do is simply to be as positive a contribution to the lives of others as I can be. I don't always do it perfectly, but I can say that I am consistent in my efforts.

I was very lucky when I first began treatment, in that I met caring people who, in addition to helping me take a good hard look at the reality of my harmful offenses, also helped me to see myself as being more than what the one dimensional label of sex offender implied that I was. They understood that beyond that label, I had many other qualities that I needed to see in order to have any hope of getting past the crush of guilt and shame that could sabotage my rehabilitation.

I am much more than just a sex offender, I am an intelligent, capable, caring man, and I make conscious efforts to find effective and meaningful ways of being a positive contribution to the lives of others. For example, I am very active in the volunteer service structure of Alcoholics Anonymous at both the State and local levels, I also sponsor other men, and am sponsored myself in AA. I hire, and keep employed, people who are in need of a fresh start, as long as they continue with their own rehabilitative programs. I write poetry and short stories, in a manner that I hope has a positive impact on my Native American culture and society in general. I am a partner in a loving, trusting, happy relationship. My wife and I see each other as true gifts from God. I am capable of doing and being so much more however, and have tried, many times, to advance my level of self improvement and constructive activities, but it is difficult to say the least.

I was able to obtain a bachelor's degree in Human Services prior to the passing of legislation that required me to register as a sex offender with the State and with any college that I attended. I have since tried to go on for a Master's degree, but have found it impossible to get accepted to schools. I have received endorsements from counselors and probation officers with whom I have worked, that speak to my strong suitability for working in the

fields of chemical dependency or sexual offender treatment, but I have been shuffled out of job interviews in those fields upon my disclosure of my past offending. I have worked my way up through the ranks of a small, service related business into a management position. I then tried to start my own, but found it impossible to qualify for an SBA loan.

Despite the frustration I felt as a result of facing these and many other obstacles, I am resolved to continue trying to better myself. I know however, that I am not the only one frustrated. My wife and family, of course, wish I had the opportunity to pursue a more challenging vocation where my efforts were better rewarded financially, as well as providing me with a sense of meaning and purpose. Additionally, I have seen the frustration of the wonderful, caring people who have worked with me, trying to help me find work, go to school or start a business, only to have their hands tied when some legal restriction arose to put a stop to our efforts.

I realize that the struggles of a convicted sex offender to rehabilitate himself are meaningless, if not contemptuous to many people. I am grateful however, so very grateful, for those who see the importance of those efforts, not only for the offender, but for society, and try to encourage and facilitate them. There is a need for safeguards that prevent the offender from engaging with society freely until his threat of re-offending has been minimized. One thing to remember about any safeguards however, is that while an adequate amount may serve a good purpose, at some point they become more of a hindrance to effective action, and at yet another, they become a detriment to the purpose they are intended to serve. If offenders are pushed out to the perimeter of society, where they can be identified and isolated, where they feel lonely, separate, different and afraid, a place where most began in the

first place, the question must be asked - are we resolving or exacerbating the problem?

Recidivism rates have been tossed about like parade candy and the headlines consistently blare louder when a convicted sex offender re-offends than when any other criminal does, but the fact of the matter is, that underneath the outrage, the large majority of convicted sex offenders are trying desperately to rehabilitate and get on with their lives. They don't re-offend, they don't lurk around school yards, and they don't scour the Internet looking for victims. They just try to get better and not hurt people anymore, and whether popular opinion believes it's right or not, they could use some help. I consider myself to be fortunate in having had support from family, friends and the professionals I've been able to work with in my rehabilitation, but others aren't as lucky and are often completely ostracized.

Most blanket approaches that identify us only as sex offenders and limit our ability to re-enter society where we can flourish as contributing members, absolutely strip us of hope, dignity and self-respect. It is important to distinguish the emotional outcry for punishment and control, from the need for rehabilitation. This then frees us to consider that to rehabilitate, or as the Merriam Webster Dictionary describes the word, *to restore or bring to a condition of health or useful and constructive activity - to reinstate*, involves much, much more. So much of the current policy for the rehabilitation of sex offenders calls for keeping them apart from, rather than encouraging them to become a part of, society.

I don't presume to have the definitive answer to this dilemma, I doubt that there is one. I do think that the answers that will work are as individual as each offender is, and that some flexibility is required to allow them to take an active part in the process, and also to allow those professionals

helping them to do their work more effectively.

Again, I very much appreciate having the opportunity to discuss this matter with you today. I have wanted for sometime to stand before a body such as this to express my concerns on, and experience with, this issue. My reluctance to step forward today comes only from my concern for friends and family who may be affected by my appearance here. I am very grateful however, for Cathy's kind offer to read my words today, and most certainly for your willingness to consider them.